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SHORT ACCOUNT
OF THE
LIFE AND OPINIONS
OF
ARCHIBALD EARL OF KELLIE.

BY GEORGE GLEIG, L. L. D. F. R. S. EDIN.

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Laudis ea via est rectissima, quam majores nostri tutam reliquerunt. CICERO.

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SHORT ACCOUNT

OF

ARCHIBALD EARL OF KELLIE.

“IT has been frequently objected to the relations of the lives of particular persons, that as they are not distinguished by any striking or wonderful vicissitudes, they are no proper objects of particular regard. But this notion arises from false measures of excellence and dignity, and must be eradicated, by considering that, in the esteem of uncorrupted reason, what is of most use is of most value. There are many invisible circumstances which, whether we read as enquirers after natural or moral knowledge, whether we intend to enlarge our science or increase our virtue, are more important than public occurrences. The business indeed of the biographer is to pass slightly over those performances and incidents which produce vulgar greatness; to lead the thoughts into domestic privacies; and to display the minute details of daily life, where exterior appendages are cast aside, and men excel each other only by prudence and by virtue.”

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SUCH were the sentiments entertained of biography by a man † who excelled in that species of writing; and he whose judgment recognises their truth, will regret that the subject of this short memoir had not employed a pen like his, which could distinguish the minutest shades of virtue and vice, and trace every action to its latent principle. The present writer, as he confesses himself unequal to such a task, proposes only to state a few leading incidents, and from them to draw a general character.

ARCHIBALD ERSKINE, the seventh Earl of Kellie, was born at Kellie Castle in the county of Fife, on the 22d of April 1736. He was the second son of Alexander the fifth Earl, by Janet second daughter of Dr Pitcairn physician in Edinburgh; a man whose fame has spread over every European country in which literature, science, and genius, are valued.

It is part of the despicable cant of the present day to affect indifference as to the station or the merits of a man's ancestors; but as his Lordship had not adopted the philosophy of France, he had no such affectation. He thought that a noble descent might be one incitement to the performance of noble actions; and he certainly considered himself as bound to maintain the great political and religious principles of that ancestor who had merited the titles which he possessed by inheritance.

To every one acquainted with the Scotch history, the rise of the family of Kellie is known to have been most honourable. The founder of it was Sir Thomas Erskine, son of Sir Alexander Erskine of Gogar brother to John Earl of Mar Regent of Scotland, and under him principal tutor to James the Sixth. Upon the death of the Regent, Sir Alexander was appointed governor to the young king, and discharged that important trust with great fidelity. He was afterwards made governor of Edinburgh castle and a privy counsellor; and amidst the numerous cabals which distracted the kingdom during the minority of James, he appears to have adhered steadily to the cause of his royal master, not only against the ferocious faction of which the Earl of Morton was the head, but sometimes also against the politics, whether timid or false, of his nephew the Earl of Mar.

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† Johnson.

THE loyalty of Sir Alexander was inherited by his son; to whom, with Sir John Ramsay, the king was principally indebted for his rescue from the Earl of Gowrie and his brother, who, on the 5th of August 1600, had contrived to get him completely in their power, and certainly intended either to carry him captive into England or to deprive him of life. For this meritorious service these two gentlemen were ennobled; and Sir Thomas Erskine having received a gift of part of Gowrie's estates, which were forfeited to the crown, was created **BARON DIRLETON, VISCOUNT FENTON**, and some years afterwards **EARL OF KELLIE**. Nor did the gratitude of James stop there. When he succeeded to the throne of England, he received into the privy council of that kingdom the man who, in his defence, had so nobly hazarded his life; appointed him captain of the yeomen of the guard, and groom of the stole; and conferred upon him the Order of the Garter.

To the principles which raised Sir Thomas Erskine to the peerage, his descendants have faithfully adhered. During the civil war, which in the last century deluged the country with blood, the loyalty of the Earl of Kellie was so conspicuous, that a patent was made out, creating him an English baron; but before it could pass the great seal in those times of confusion, the King was murdered, and the constitution overthrown.

WHEN it is considered who was the Sovereign who intended to bestow upon the Earl this testimony of his regard, it cannot be doubted but that the disappointment was felt as a very sensible loss; but it was not the only loss which his Lordship was doomed to suffer for maintaining the religious and political principles of his ancestors. By the usurping powers he was prosecuted as a *malignant*, and deprived of great part of his extensive domains, which Charles II. wanted either the ability or the inclination to restore to the family; and from that period to the present, the opulence of the Earls of Kellie has borne no proportion to their rank in the state.

THEIR innate honour, however, of which, as it was not derived from kings, usurpers could not rob them, remained unfulfilled; and the subject of this memoir was educated in all the ancient principles which charac-

terised the race from which he had sprung. He was taught to consider the British constitution as the most perfect system of civil polity that the world has ever seen; the prerogatives of the crown as not less essential to it than the most boasted privileges of parliament; and loyalty to the Sovereign as a virtue of high rank.

WITH a mind on which these sentiments were deeply impressed, he entered at an early period of life into the army: but though he continued in it for twenty-six years, he never obtained a higher commission than that of Major.

FOR such very slow promotion it is not easy to account. By those who served with him in the only considerable action in which he was ever engaged, his behaviour is said to have been that of a cool and intrepid foldier; by none who knew him will he be supposed to have been other than scrupulously attentive to his duty; and without valuing himself on that superficial knowledge in tactics, which renders the conversation of some officers so disgusting, he was certainly well acquainted with the common evolutions of the army, and had read more on the art of war than many men of meaner birth, who have, in a shorter period, risen to the rank of General. His monarchical and high church notions, supposed perhaps to spring from the known attachment of his family to the house of *Stuart*, may have retarded his promotion, so long as to speak contemptuously of that house was deemed the surest test of loyalty to the reigning Sovereign: but to all who had the happiness of Major Erskine's acquaintance, it must indeed be matter of surprise, that, after these illiberal prejudices were banished from the public mind, he was not rapidly raised to that rank to which by his long service he was so well entitled.

ALTHOUGH no man could be more feelingly alive to this treatment than he was, it never lessened his dutiful and affectionate attachment to his Sovereign, or tempted him for a moment to enlist himself under the banners of any of those factions which have disturbed the government during the present reign. He had not in his youth learned, nor in his manhood could he be persuaded by all the arguments of *patriotic* oratory, that
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“ the power of the crown has increased, is increasing, and ought to be diminished ;” but neglected as he was by the Court, he maintained through life, that, in a mixed government like ours, the constitutional prerogatives of the crown form the surest bulwark to the liberties of the subject.

WHEN by the death of his elder brother in 1781 he succeeded to the titles of his ancestors, and to the wreck of their fortune, he very justly thought that it became his dignity to relinquish a profession in which he had met with so little encouragement ; and he soon afterwards disposed of his commission. It has been already observed, that for more than a century past the affluence of the Earls of Kellie has not been equal to their rank ; and it must here be added, that the sixth Earl found himself under the necessity of selling the estate which gave him his highest title, and which, during all the vicissitudes of their fortune, had hitherto remained in the possession of the family. To gratify some of his relations, he reserved indeed the Castle and a few inclosed fields about it ; but these were comparatively of so little importance, that none but a man nobly attached to the inheritance of his fathers would have thought of retiring from the world, in the prime of life, to employ his time and his taste in improving their beauty and increasing their value. Such a man was the subject of this memoir.

ARCHIBALD Earl of KELLIE, as soon as he had quitted the army, resided for the greater part of every year at the Castle ; which, without absurdly attempting to modernize its gothic grandeur, or to change the form of its ancient decorations, he converted into an elegant and commodious house, every way suitable to the dignity of its owner. Nor was his taste less successfully employed in embellishing his small domain than in adorning his mansion. At his accession, though agricultural improvements had for some time been making a rapid progress through Scotland, the lands of Kellie exhibited to the eye of the spectator the same unadorned prospect, varied only by pasturage and corn-fields, which they must have exhibited half a century before ; but in the compass of a very few years they were, under his management, made to assume the appearance of a garden.

WHILE

WHILE this Noble Lord was thus embellishing what remained of his paternal estate at an expence which might have been supposed to exhaust almost the whole of his income, he was enabled by the most judicious œconomy to support the ancient hospitality of his house. Delicate, perhaps fastidious, in the choice of his companions, he was not indeed incumbered by crowds of visitors; but those, who were admitted to his table, experienced at Kellie Castle that kind of entertainment, which cultivated minds wish to receive from men of rank: they were sure to enjoy, if they were capable of such enjoyment, “the feast of reason and the flow of soul.”

THE Earl of Kellie’s time, however, was not to be wholly devoted to rural amusements. Being chosen one of the sixteen representatives of the Scotch peerage in the parliament which met at Westminster on the 25th of November 1790, he had an opportunity of displaying the worth of his character in a station more important than he had ever before filled; and he did not disappoint the expectations of his friends. He was not indeed fitted, either by nature or by early habits, to make a figure as an orator; nor would his good sense permit him to attempt what he was conscious he could not properly perform, and what, when performed in the most brilliant manner, he considered, perhaps justly, as of no great importance: but he paid unwearied attention to the business which came before the house; and such observations as he made on the different questions on which he was to vote, were always to the purpose. As a legislator he acted upon the same monarchical and high-church principles which he had uniformly professed as a private man; and of course he supported the measures of the crown against the systematical opposition of what he deemed a faction.

ATTACHED however as he was to the monarchical branch of the constitution, he was by no means regardless of the rights of the subject. Of his attention to them he gave some very convincing proofs by the active part which he took in procuring liberty of conscience to two bodies of men, who, even in this free country, and towards the end of the eighteenth century, were liable to be legally persecuted for worshipping God after the manner of their fathers.

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FROM the era of the Revolution, when Episcopacy ceased to be in Scotland the form of church-government supported by the state, penal laws had at different times been enacted, to prevent the bad consequences of the attachment, whether real or supposed, of the Scotch Episcopalians to the abdicated family of Stuart; and two of these laws, passed in 1746 and 1748, were of such a nature, that, even in those days of party-prejudice and political rancour, they were deemed injudiciously severe by enlightened men of all descriptions. The avowed object of them was to eradicate disaffection to the government; but their obvious tendency was to force from the communion of the Episcopal church every man of rank and opulence; though it might have been clearly foreseen, that of these very few would, by compulsion, be made to unite themselves with the establishment.

“ To be of no church is dangerous. Religion, of which the rewards are distant, and which is animated only by faith and hope, will glide by degrees out of the mind, unless it be invigorated and reimpresed by external ordinances, by stated calls to worship, and by the salutary influence of example.” The truth of this observation was fully verified in the Scotch Episcopalians. Excluded from their own chapels, and prevented, by pride perhaps, as well as by principle, from frequenting the churches to which the hand of power seemed inclined to drive them, the religious impressions of their youth gradually vanished from their minds; and they were exposed, unarmed, to the shafts of infidelity. The Earl of Kellie, whose principles were untainted by the fashionable philosophy of the times, being himself a member of the Scotch Episcopal church, had long regretted the restraints which were laid upon her worship; and to his unwearied exertions it was chiefly owing that in 1792 those restraints were removed by an Act of Parliament.

IN serving the cause of Episcopacy in Scotland his Lordship was indeed serving himself; but he was soon furnished with an opportunity of showing that he could act with equal energy from motives less interested.

THE penal laws which oppressed the Scotch Catholics, as they were a still greater disgrace to the Statute-book than those which had so lately been
been

been in force against the Protestant Episcopalians, every man of a liberal mind had long wished to see repealed ; but when it was proposed in 1778 to repeal some of the severest of them, such commotions were excited in Scotland as frightened those who then guided the helm of the state from carrying into effect their humane intention. Mens minds, however, became gradually more enlightened ; and when the measure was resumed by the present administration, such relief was granted to the Catholics in Scotland as, whether it entirely satisfied them or not, was highly grateful to the head of their church. This appears from different medals, letters, and other testimonies of gratitude which, for his active endeavours to procure their emancipation, the Earl of Kellie had the honour to receive, as well from the Sovereign Pontiff as from other Italian ecclesiastics of very high rank.

To a mind like his, such approbation of his conduct would undoubtedly be pleasing ; but his greatest pleasure must have sprung from the applauding whispers of his own conscience. Humane by nature, he abhorred cruelty under every form ; just by principle, he could not but see that no human legislature has a right to prescribe to individuals the articles of their religious creed, or the rites and ceremonies with which they shall worship their Maker ; and deeply impressed with a sense of the highest honour, he must have thought with indignation of a law which exposed the liberty and property of the most harmless member of the church of Rome to the mean malevolence of every vile informer. It can therefore excite no wonder that his Lordship valued himself more for his exertions in behalf of the Scotch Episcopalians and Scotch Catholics than for any other action which he had ever performed.

THIS valuable life was now drawing towards a conclusion. Temperance had hitherto exempted him from almost every disease ; but in July 1795 he exhibited some alarming symptoms. These, however, yielded to the powers of medicine ; and his friends flattered themselves with the hopes of long enjoying the pleasure of his Lordship's society : but their hopes were quickly blasted. The former symptoms soon returned with such aggravation as too surely evinced that his sufferings were occasioned by *hydrothorax* ; a disease against which the skill of the physician is commonly

monly exerted in vain. It was so exerted in the case of his Lordship, who, after lingering long under this severe distress, on the 8th of May 1797 resigned his soul into the hands of his Creator with the calm fortitude of a pious Christian.

Of his general character the reader must already have formed some opinion. Inflexible integrity, a high sense of honour, and an unshaken belief in the Christian religion, directed every important transaction of his life; and although in the large circle of his acquaintance there were doubtless many who did not regard him with the fondness of friendship, it is not perhaps too much to say, that ARCHIBALD EARL OF KELLIE had not a single enemy.

Without pretending to great erudition himself, he loved learning and learned men; but he abhorred the character of a *modern* philosopher. Such philosophers indeed as NEWTON, and BOYLE, and BERKELEY, and JOHNSON, he revered as the ornaments of human nature; but he could not speak without indignation of those who are daily enlightening the world with their *discoveries* in politics, in morals, and in religion. "I have heard (said he when on his death-bed) many infidel-arguments in conversation, and I have read some books expressly written against the authenticity and inspiration of the sacred scriptures; but I thank God, that the most impartial inquiry which I have been able to make into the truth of religion, has confirmed my faith; for without that faith, how comfortless should I now be!" It was indeed that faith which, under very severe sufferings, so completely supported him, that, during the long course of nine months, he never uttered a complaint which would have disgraced a primitive martyr.

His Lordship's monarchical principles have been already mentioned, as well as the attachment of his family to the house of Stuart. He was himself attached to that house, but not to such a degree as to give reason to call in question his allegiance to the family on the throne. His was the attachment of gratitude, and not the weak prejudice of Jacobitism; of which the following anecdote may be given as an instance. In 1788 he received from a club or society in Edinburgh a letter, requesting him to
contribute

contribute to the expence of a monument to be erected to the honour of King William, and to perpetuate the memory of what he did, at the Revolution, for the religion and liberty of these nations. His Lordship having read the letter, threw it from him with great indignation. "It would appear (said he to the writer of this memoir) that these patriotic gentlemen do not consider gratitude as a virtue, or they could not have thought of making such a request to me. The Revolution has indeed been productive of many happy consequences, and on account of them I rejoice that it took place; but no good man can approve of the motives which influenced the conduct of King William on that occasion; and surely no man of the name of ERSKINE, whatever may be his opinion of the last James, will contribute any thing to show thus publicly that he rejoices in the downfall of an ancient house, by which his own family was raised above the common rank of their fellow-citizens."

HIS Lordship's private virtues were of the most amiable kind. He was a dutiful son, an affectionate brother, a steady friend, an obliging neighbour, and to his servants a kind and indulgent master. He possessed a quick discernment of whatever was wrong or ridiculous: and in small parties, consisting of men whose principles he approved, he was not unwilling to expose it; for there his conversation was easy, and his humour was exquisite, whilst in mixed companies, and even before a single stranger, he generally preserved a dignified silence. By those to whom he was not intimately known, this silence was thought to proceed from the pride of birth; but it was in truth the offspring of taste and diffidence—of taste which viewed an ideal perfection to which diffidence would hardly permit him to aspire. That he had a due value for noble birth, is indeed known to all who knew him; but, as he valued it only for the reason which has been already mentioned, he was so far from thinking that it could atone for the want of personal worth, that no man more heartily assented to the maxim of the Grecian chief,

*Nam genus et proavos et quæ non fecimus ipsi,
Vix ea nostra voco.*



Dear Sir

Edinburgh 17th August 1797

I have received from Lady Anne Erskine a letter accompanying - a short account
of the life & opinions of her Brother the late Earl of Kellie, which by her Ladyship's
desire I have the honour of transmitting to you, under a separate cover, & which I
hope will go safely to your hand. Lady Anne certainly sends it with great propriety
to you, for whom Lord Kellie took every opportunity of expressing the highest esteem
& affection, & on this occasion I flatter myself you will pardon me for quoting a
passage from a letter of his Lordship to me dated in September last. "Mr Dundas & I
have always been very well together, he is a most valuable person, nor can any
thing equal the strength of his head, but the excellence of his heart, which last he
employs very often improperly at least in my opinion, by his being too apt to forgive
those Miscreants who would be very ready to do him any Injury, if they could, or if
they durst." It is easy to guess whom his Lordship means by those miscreants
but altho the quotation appears to blame you for an amiable failing, it conveys at
the same time, tho' indirectly the emphatic compliment of your being a good Christian.

The Author of the Account has not neglected to take notice of Lord Kellie's prejudices
which being early imbib'd, were naturally very strong, but they were the prejudices of
an honest man who meant well, & acted up to that meaning. Mr Arb' desires to
Join in most respectful Compliments, & I am Dear Sir with the utmost regard Your
most faithful & obliged Servant. Rob: Arbuthnot